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★ D.L. ... U.S. ...

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Tuesday, December 25, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Christmas Stories." Special program for Christmas Day.

--ooOoo--

Merry Christmas, everybody. And what a merry Christmas day it is. . . In my mind's eye, I can see all the beautiful dolls Santa Claus brought last night -- the toy airplanes and trains, the roller skates and sleds and story books. What a world of magic in the story books!

Last night I went to a Christmas Eve party -- an old-fashioned family affair. The youngsters recited their favorite Christmas verses, and the oldsters recalled their favorite Christmas stories. And how my young nephew Billy did wish he had consulted a certain well-worn story book, before he left home. For Billy waited to recite "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" and -- can you believe it? -- he had forgotten the order of the lines! He remembered the beginning---

"'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse,
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care
In hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there."

That was as far as he could go. It was a sad moment. . .

My contribution to the party was a quotation from Charles Dickens. I wonder how many of you will recognize these words:

"I have always thought of the Christmas time as a <u>good</u> time, a kind, forgiving, charitable time, the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women seem by one consent to open up their shut-up hearts freely. And, though it never has put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe it has done me good, and I will say God bless it."

Of course, <u>everybody</u> knew the story of the Cratchits' Christmas goose, from Dickens' Christmas Carol -- and somebody remembered "Christmas at Wardle's," from Pickwick Papers, and somebody else mentioned "Fezziwig's Christmas," from The Cricket on the Hearth. . . Judge Gordon, who, it seems to me, <u>always</u> has a copy of O. Henry within reach, reminded us of that famous story, "The Gifts of the Magi," and then we all settled down to listen to Uncle Horace.

Uncle Horace told us stories he'd read of Christmas in Wakefield, Virginia, when George Washington was a boy. Great piles of wood were cut, and hauled by oxen, to be ready for the big day. On Christmas Eve the great hickory log was brought in; the log had been soaked in the creek to make it last longer. For days there had been baking, and months before that, jelly-making and pickle-making. There were black walnuts and brandied peaches; fruit cake and plum pudding, prepared long before and put away to grow mellow and rich; hams from the smoke house;

roast turkey. After breakfast -- and even that was a sumptuous meal -- everybody went to church. The church had been decorated with holly and cedar, and crows-foot and scarlet berries from the neighboring swamps.

It was a cold ride home from church. So cold, in fact, that the ladies used heated soapstones, to warm their slippered feet. Can't you see the ladies of young George Washington's time, clad in satins and brocades and velvets, coming home from church? The Washingtons; the Carters; and the Lees, from Stratford and Chantilly.

And what a Christmas dinner! According to old records, the feast included oysters from Monroe's creek; fish from the Potomac; wild ducks, fried chicken; hominy and sweet potatoes and salsify, turnips and mashed potatoes, and I don't know how many more vegetables. Of course, there was a huge turkey gobbler, crisp and brown, fairly bursting with succulent dressing. And the boar's head was brought in on a gleaming round platter, accompanied by servants who carried candles.

At one end of the table was the great plum pudding, at the other smoking-hot mince pies. Lining each side of the table, cranberry tarts and lemon puddings, amber-colored jelly "shaking with Christmas joy," and sillabubs and luscious pound cake. When the cloth was removed, the servants brought on the wines, and oranges from Spain, and raisins and prunes and olives; old English cheese, and almonds and walnuts. When dinner was over, old Uncle Tom was ready with his fiddle, and it was "on with the dance," -- cotillions and jigs and the Virginia Reel -- only at that early date I believe the Virginia Reel was known as the Roger de Coverley. I'd like to have been there. . .

Well, there were more stories. (I mean at our party last night.) Young Henry, home for the holidays, said he'd just discovered Gilbert and Sullivan's line, "Life is a pudding full of plums." At the mention of plum pudding, somebody else remembered Leigh Hunt's description of that festive dish:

"Plum pudding! What a word is that! How plump and plump again! How round and repeated and plenipotential! There are two p's, observe, in plenipotential; and so there are in plum pudding. Why the whole round cheek of universal childhood is in the idea of plum pudding; ay, and the weight of manhood and the plenitude of the majesty of city dames. Observe a little boy at Christmas dinner and his grandfather opposite him. What a world of secret similarity there is between them! How hope in one, and retrospection in the other, and appetite in both meet over the same ground of pudding and understand it to a nicety."

And so I leave you -- with another "Merry Christmas" all around.

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